

Comments On USSR Area Program

As a substitute participant in the USSR program, I can comment only on the basis of impressions gained at the half dozen sessions I attended.

1. I think the area program can contribute to the analyst's effectiveness. The opportunity to explore with a group the background of situations encountered on the job is helpful. New approaches to familiar material stimulate thought and deepen understanding. For the non-specialist some familiarity with the USSR and its institutions is vital.

2. Several of the lectures and seminars which I attended were useful to me directly in my work as a library analyst and all of them from the point of view of background material. Soviet foreign policy, the role of the peasant, Soviet intelligence, problems in economic planning etc. are all subjects frequently encountered in documents coming through the Analysis branch of the library. Increased knowledge naturally facilitates the subject coding.

3. The subject matter then was relevant to my work. I am less enthusiastic about the method of presentation. Ideally, I think there should be two groups, one for the specialists with an opportunity for considerable specific discussion and one for the non-specialist with the greater emphasis on the lecture technique. Little can be gained by the instructor asking specific historical questions of people who are not specialists and who are perhaps many years removed from academic study of the subject. Since people of all degrees of familiarity with the subject were grouped together the tendency was, I think, for the embarrassed not to return and for the specialist to feel that the course could contribute little to his understanding.

Because I began substituting toward the end of the course, I have no comment on its length. Two hour sessions seemed fine. Breaks are not necessary.

4. Suggested reading would be helpful.

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